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Viewing cable 06BEIRUT2625, LEBANON: GHATTAS KHOURY SUPPORTS GRADUAL SOLUTION

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Reference ID	Created	Released	Classification	Origin
06BEIRUT2625	2006-08-14 16:25	2011-08-30 01:44	CONFIDENTIAL	Embassy Beirut

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SUBJECT: LEBANON: GHATTAS KHOURY SUPPORTS GRADUAL SOLUTION
TO HIZBALLAH ARMS

Classified By: Jeffrey D. Feltman, Ambassador. Reason: Section 1.4 (d)
).

SUMMARY

¶1. (C) During an August 14 lunch with Ambassador Feltman and poloff, former Hariri MP and Jumblatt-ally Ghattas Khoury said that now -- meaning today -- is not the time to corner Hizballah on full disarmament, although that moment is quickly approaching. Voicing concern about the increasingly threatening tone being used against March 14 movement politicians, and claiming that Syria hopes to sow civil war in Lebanon, Khoury nevertheless does not believe that the current Cabinet impasse will lead to a violent confrontation. Khoury said that Nabih Berri is the key player in getting Hizballah to agree to disarm south of the Litani and in securing replacement of President Emile Lahoud. Khoury's meeting was a prelude to the Ambassador's dinner meeting later on August 14 with Walid Jumblatt (to be reported septel), whom Khoury admitted has a much less gradualist view of Hizballah disarmament. End Summary.

DEALING WITH HIZBALLAH

¶2. (C) Khoury is a Maronite from Jumblatt's Shouf region who used to hold the one Maronite MP seat for Beirut, on Rafiq Hariri's parliamentary list. Now a close ally to Saad Hariri, Khoury does not feel that the Cabinet should confront Hizballah now about full disarmament, as PM Siniora privately argues, but rather should concentrate on an initial phase of disarmament south of the Litani river. According to Khoury, this would put a safe distance between Hizballah and its nemesis, Israel, thereby causing the group's militancy to wither. "Get them away from the border, and they become obsolete. There is no harm in stalling for a year."

¶3. (C) Ultimately, according to Khoury, Hizballah must be convinced that a strong Lebanese state is the best salvation for Lebanon. The GOL has an excellent opportunity to demonstrate its effectiveness through championing the reconstruction effort in the South, though Khoury stressed that any support should not be channelled through Berri or Hizballah. He suggested that the effort be "Arab-led."

¶4. (C) Khoury commented that, "legally we're very covered" on the issue of disarmament, based on the Taif Accords and UNSCRs 1559, 1680, and 1701. All call in one way or another for Hizballah disarmament. He did not think it would be a big problem to get Hizballah to agree at least to disarmament south of the Litani. He admitted that Jumblatt is much more hard-line on the issue of full Hizballah disarmament, concerned that Hizballah weapons north of the Litani could be used against his nearby Shouf stronghold of Mukhtara. "Walid says, either we have a deal now on full disarmament, or there is no deal."

STORM CLOUDS?

¶5. (C) Khoury worried about the foreboding tone in recent days in the Hizballah-affiliated press, accusing March 14 Cabinet ministers of treachery and of conspiring with Israel to weaken "the resistance." He believed that Syria, largely ignored during the negotiations over UNSCR 1701, would try to foment civil war in Lebanon. Khoury did not think it likely that Hizballah would choose to turn its weapons on other Lebanese. "It would lose a lot. It then becomes a militia. But, it'd be a big militia."

¶6. (C) Khoury held that Syria's ultimate goal in stirring up trouble in Lebanon is to divert attention away from the investigation into the assassination of Rafiq Hariri,

including a special tribunal of international character that would try suspects. Khoury added though that Syrian influence in Lebanon has diminished to the extent that "the Iranians" -- like FM Mottaki -- "now come for themselves to Lebanon," whereas Syrian FM Mouallem's visit last week was viewed as mostly ineffectual. (Note: Khoury said there is a joke currently making the Beirut circuit -- and there are lots of them -- playing on the physical resemblance between Mouallem and Ariel Sharon. End Note.)

BEIRUT 00002625 002 OF 002

AGAIN, IT ALL COMES BACK TO BERRI

¶7. (C) As we have heard in many of our meetings, Khoury said that Nabih Berri is the key in getting Hizballah agreement to disarm south of the Litani and in assuring the ouster of President Lahoud. Khoury, who like many Maronite politicians entertains his own presidential ambitions, asked the Ambassador to urge Berri to come up with a "list of five names" of people whom Berri could support for the Presidency. The Patriarch and the March 14 movement would then review the list and choose their favorite. He also urged the Ambassador to "convince Walid to talk to Nabih" about Hizballah disarmament and the Presidency, and that Walid could assure Nabih that "his role (as Speaker) would be protected."

FELTMAN